Early Voting Begins in the US: Here's What to Know

Many voters in the US have options to cast their ballots before election Day, November 5. Reports say that some have already started receiving mail-in ballots. Early voting became popular in 2020, when the coronavirus pandemic was in full swing, as it allowed people to avoid crowding into polling stations. Reports say over 100 million voters cast their ballots by mail or in person before Election Day.

Why Early Voting

Early voting opportunities ensure that more people can cast a ballot regardless of disability, time constraints, work, travel or other factors that could hamper them on

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election day. It also presents an opportunity to build enthusiasm, a vital tool candidates can use to increase voters turnout during election cycles.

How Does Early Voting Work in the US

Early voting allows individuals to cast their ballots before **Election Day**, giving them more flexibility. Most states provide options for both in-person and mail voting, although the specifics can differ by state.

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Traditionally, voters unable to attend the polls on Election Day had to request an absentee ballot. However, in many states, mail-in and absentee ballots work the same way, even though the terminology may vary. In 14 states, including Texas, South Carolina, and Indiana, voters provide a valid reason to obtain an absentee ballot.

In-person early voting is another option. In some states, this resembles absentee voting, where individuals can go to polling places, fill out a mail-in ballot, and submit it in one visit. In other states, early **voting follows the same procedures as on Election Day, using polling machines to cast votes.**

Which States Offer Early Voting?

All states in the U.S. provide some form of mail voting, allowing voters to cast their ballots by mail. Also, nearly all states (except Alabama, Mississippi, and New Hampshire) offer in-person early voting, which lets people vote before Election Day at designated polling places.

The District of Columbia and territories like Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands provide in-person early voting options. The three states that do not have early voting—Alabama, Mississippi, and New Hampshire—still offer absentee voting, which allows certain voters to cast their ballots by mail under specific circumstances.

Early Voting Schedule for U.S. States

A report by the New York Times state the early voting schedule as follows:

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Sept. 11 — Alabama became the first state to initiate early voting, sending absentee ballots to eligible voters who provided a valid reason. North Carolina was poised to be the first to distribute mail ballots, but this was postponed due to legal issues surrounding the removal of Robert F. Kennedy Jr.’s name after his exit from the race.

Sept. 19 — Wisconsin began mailing ballots to those who had requested them.

Sept. 20 — Minnesota and South Dakota started offering both mail and in-person early voting, while

Virginia launched its in-person early voting option.

Sept. 21 — This marked the federal deadline for mailing absentee ballots to military and overseas voters, prompting eleven states to begin sending out mail-in ballots.

Sept. 23 — Mississippi started distributing absentee ballots to voters who had applied.

Sept. 24 — North Carolina began mailing ballots to voters who requested them.

Sept. 26 — Mail-in voting commenced in Michigan, where voters need to request their ballots.

Sept. 30 — Nebraska started sending mail ballots to eligible voters who had made requests.

Oct. 7 — Georgia initiated the mailing of ballots to eligible voters.

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Oct. 9 — Arizona began both in-person and mail-in voting; voters must request inclusion on the state’s

Active Early Voter List to receive mail ballots.

Oct. 15 — In-person early voting launched in Georgia.

Oct. 16 — Nevada mailed ballots to all registered voters.

Oct. 17 — North Carolina commenced in-person early voting.

Oct. 19 — Nevada began its in-person early voting.

Oct. 21 — Texas started its in-person early voting period.

Oct. 22 — Wisconsin initiated in-person early voting, while counties in Pennsylvania must begin mailing ballots to applicants if they haven't done so already.

Oct. 26 — Michigan opened in-person early voting, becoming the last battleground state to do so.

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Early voting, particularly mail-in voting, became a contentious issue during the 2020 election. This controversy largely stemmed from unfounded claims of election fraud.

Historically, more Democrats have utilized mail-in voting compared to Republicans, who tend to vote in person on Election Day. In many jurisdictions, ballots cast in person are counted before those received by mail, leading to a situation where early results may show Republican candidates leading. As mail-in **votes—predominantly from Democratic voters**—are counted later, the initial results can shift, creating what some call a "blue shift" (a late surge in Democratic votes) or a "red mirage" (an early lead for Republicans that fades as more votes are counted).

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In 2020, former President Donald Trump falsely claimed that the mail-in voting system was fraught with fraud, contributing to the narrative that the election was stolen from him after he lost to Democrat Joe Biden. Despite losing, Trump has continued to assert that the election results were manipulated.

In response to these claims, many state legislatures implemented new restrictions on early voting and increased scrutiny for mail-in ballots following the 2020 election. However, in the current election cycle, reports say the Republican Party has started to embrace early voting more fully, particularly as Trump campaigns again against **Democratic candidate Kamala Harris.**